

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

THE WONDERFUL STORY OF A WONDERFUL CREATURE WHICH WAS HATCHED OUT OF A FOSSIL EGG WHICH HARRY RAMSDELL FOUND IN A STONE QUARRY

HARRY RAMSDELL sat on the steps reading, and his little brother Gardiner sat beside him watching the antics of seven small puppies that, rolling over their mother, gnawing her stumpy tail and otherwise disturbing her rest, seemed to be having the time of their lives. After a space, Gardiner spoke:

"Ain't they funny?" said he. "Say, Harry, do all little animals have fun like that?"

"Most of them," replied Harry, looking very wise, as he always did when his small brother asked questions, for Harry was twelve and very learned, indeed.

"Do turtles?" asked Gardiner. "I'd like to see a litter of turtles cutting up."

"Aw, turtles come from eggs," said his brother, scornfully. "They don't have any fun. The mother turtle just leaves the eggs in the sand and they hatch out; that's all. Sun does it, I guess."

"That's funny," cried Gardiner. "I'd like to see them in the turtle's nest."

"Oh, golly," cried Harry. "They don't make any nest, I tell you. Just dig a hole in the sand; that's all."

"I thought only birds laid eggs," added the little fellow.

"All reptiles—turtles, snakes, frogs, lizards—as well as insects, lay eggs," said the wise brother. "Some of them make a sort of nest, that is, the insects do, but not the lizards and things. I guess they are hatched out by the sun's heat. I've seen an ant's nest. It's fine."

"I wonder," mused Gardiner, "if you found some turtle's eggs somewhere and brought 'em home would they hatch out by the stove?"

"Why, I suppose so, but I guess it would be pretty hard to find 'em," replied Harry, and then he sat thinking instead of reading, for the question had aroused interest in such a search. He decided to make an effort to find some turtle's eggs and try the experiment for himself before the summer came.

Where to seek for the eggs he hadn't the least idea, but old Tommy Taylor, who drove the stage and who had once been an oysterman, told him to look along the banks of Billman's Creek until he saw seven tiny holes in a circle in the sand and there he would of a certainty unearth turtle eggs.

Harry did not have the least idea that old Tommy was fooling him, and had at once told several of his cronies about it so that they, too, could have fun with the boy who was hunting turtle eggs in June, when all the little turtles have long been hatched out and are swimming around merrily. He went eagerly to work on his quest. Day after day he sought for the seven little holes in a circle, but he never found them.

Instead, however, he saw many very interesting things in the egg and hatching line. He found in the swamp the flat, carelessly-made nests of the mudhens and herons, also that of a wood duck; he learned how the spiders build their beautiful webs, how the sand-wasp digs her tunnel and fills it with captured spiders, staked with a wonderful poison that benumbs them but preserves them until her young hatch out, to find a supply of fresh food right beside them, and also he learned how the terrible sand-wasp can sting a boy who gets too near and becomes too inquisitive.

He saw beetles rolling balls of stuff far larger than themselves into their underground homes, he saw them undermine a dead mouse and sink it into the earth, burying it as in a grave, he came upon insects that looked exactly like wrinkled dead leaves and gray twigs.

He saw the dragon-flies when they were hideous crawling water-bugs come creeping up a stalk and blossom out into a dazzling iridescent winged creature, flashing like a gem in the sunlight. He watched the pollywogs turn into tadpoles and then into little frogs, and was amazed to learn that what he had always thought to be fish were really reptiles; he watched the kingfisher and the fish-hawk teach their young how to fish.

He found whole colonies of fiddler-crabs rustling hither and thither, each with his one big white claw crooked up against his shoulder as if about to begin to play the violin, but he never saw them really do any fiddling. He even discovered the deep pit of an antlion, with the fierce insect concealed in the sand at the bottom, and he watched an unsuspecting ant come up eagerly and "rubber" down into the pit only to be overcome by a shower of sand, hurled up at him by the hidden enemy, and so hurrying down to the bottom to be seized by the antlion instantly.

He saw the ants climb up bushes and milk their cows, which are Aphids or rosellies, tiny, fat insects who seem to like the ants to stroke them and give up drops of honey-like syrup in return, while I imagine that the ants protect them; they certainly guard them and keep them from straying.

Down in the stream he often saw the prickly sticklebacks hovering over their eggs lying on the bottom, for these are perhaps the only fish who care for their eggs at all.

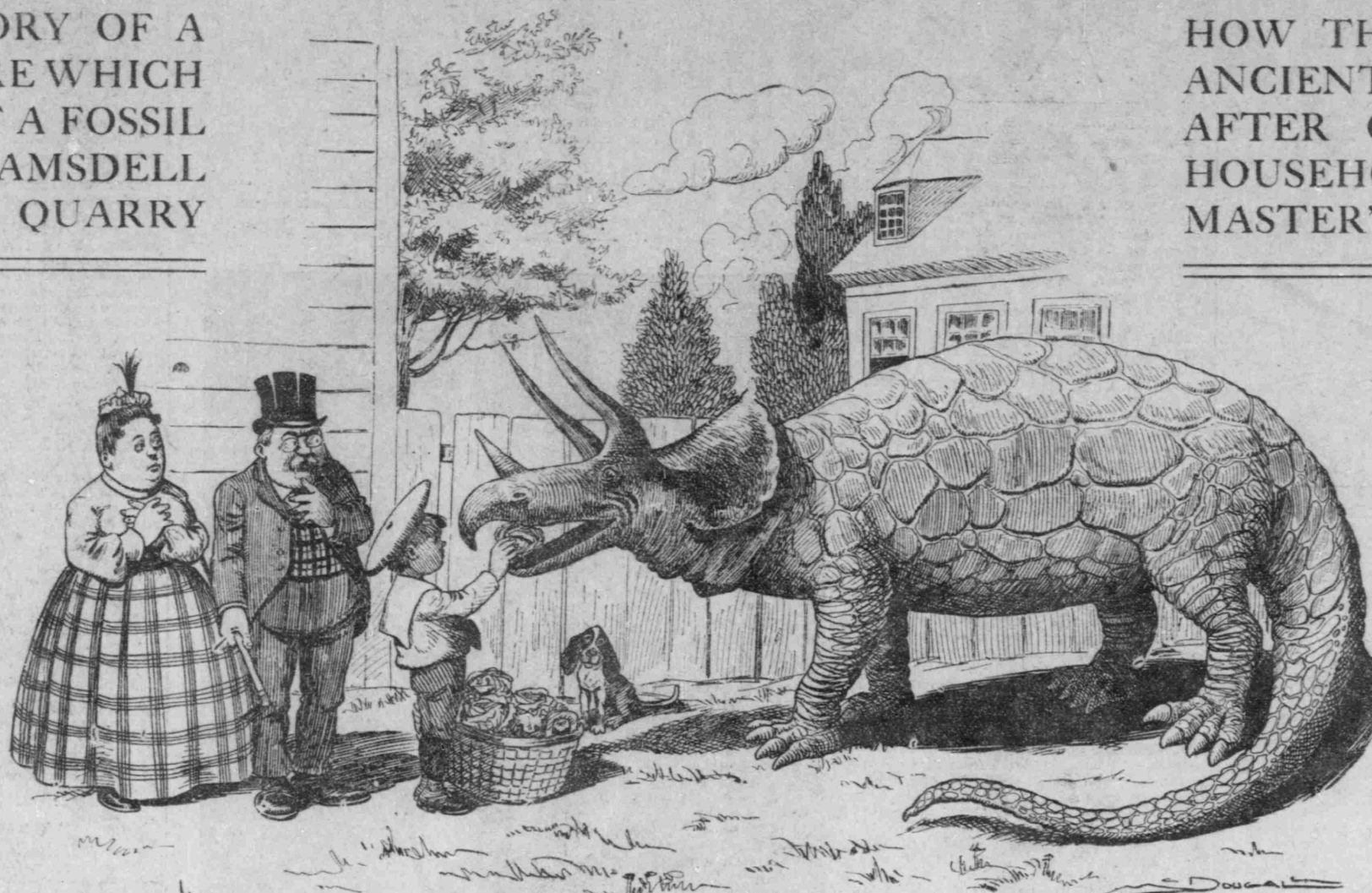
He watched the golden-bellied sunfish seemingly caressing one another, rubbing their sides softly together like so many pussy cats, and very few people have seen this, let me tell you; he spied upon the muskrats repairing their houses of rushes and bringing their blind little youngsters out to get warm in the hot sun.

He stoned blacksnakes that tried to steal the birds' eggs and tiny fledglings shrieking in fear; caught a mink coming out of the creek with a fish almost as long as himself in his mouth; waked up countless numbers of sleepy owls hiding in the bushes and frightened thousands of busy field-mice in the grass.

One day he found a poor starved dog, and took him home to nurse back to bounding health and strength, after which he had an ally who could find more funny things in a day than Harry could in a month.

They called the dog Pinky, because he was a dirty yellow, I suppose, and he was a wonder. It was simply marvelous how he changed from a satisfied, covering wait into an uproarious, rollicking rascal over ready for a romp or a hunt, and with an appetite for everything from raw clams to pumpkin pie.

All this seeking amid the wonders of the summer



THE CREATURE SOON PROVED HIMSELF A VEGETARIAN

time had filled Harry with a deep desire to learn all about the things he so constantly saw and others that he had not yet found, and he took to reading books about Nature as eagerly as he had searched for turtle's eggs; for after a time Tommy could no longer keep the joke to himself and he told it to Mr. Ramsdell, Harry's father, who promptly informed his son, for he didn't believe in fooling little boys, any more than I do myself.

So when the lad no longer had a motive for rambling in the fields and meadows, his parents imagined that he would give up getting his clothes all torn and muddy and take to playing marbles or tag with the other children, but it had become a real passion with Harry. He cared for nothing so much as to wander through the woods or along the water's edge watching the birds, bees, butterflies and fish, and whenever he had a chance off he went.

Of course, he soon began to read about the rocks and the marvelous things that are found in them, by those who know how to search for them, things turned to stone millions of years ago—fish, shells, starfish, crabs, insects, animals and plants, as many in number as are alive and growing to-day, but so vastly different as to astonish anybody who sees them.

Birds there were then, and their bodies are now found in stones, with teeth in their great strong beaks, and let's wings with claws on the ends, tails like lizards, and as big as oxen; great reptiles, huge lizards just like railroad trains and as tall as the trees, armed with horns and covered with scales as hard as your teeth and as shiny; horses with four toes like a dog's; tortoises as big as carts; shells bigger than apple-barrels; fish-like monsters as long as the City Hall; tree-trunks as thick as your room is wide, with leaves like table-tops; insects as large as rails and plates; all manner of marvels—crawling, leaping, swimming and flying over the earth and water.

He soon learned where to go to find these things.

In the old quarry which his father partly owned the men broke out big stones and split them and chiseled them all day long, and in them they came upon the wonderful shells, bones and leaves of the ancient time. So Harry haunted the quarry whenever he could, and soon he had his room full of rocky wonders; stupendous things that infected every boy in Watertown with the same fever, until on Saturdays there was scarce room in the quarry for the busy workmen.

Huge, rounded, rolled up shells of limestone ornamented every boy's mantelpiece, and even the schoolmaster was bitten by the craze and went to work studying geology in order to keep up with the new-found learning of his scholars. Harry also read about the remains of the people who lived on the earth long before history or even fairy tales tell us anything about mankind.

He picked up stone implements in the fields when they were plowing, arrow-heads, axes and clubs made of stone, for in the time of the stone age, a hundred thousand years ago, iron had not been discovered, and even needles and pins had to be made of bone or deer horn, and a knife was chipped out of a flinty stone.

When you think of trying to chop down a tree with a dull stone axe you will soon find that the hatchet you are using is a keen-edged tool by comparison, even if it has never been ground since it was bought; and to think of sharpening a slate pencil with a stone knife brings the shivers to me, at least.

Lots of such things Harry discovered, and when the others found out how many such treasures were buried in the fields they, too, began to seek, for there are thousands and thousands of such things almost everywhere.

I suppose you have yourself picked up a tiny arrow head or two as you walked across a field. That little chipped stone is older than anything made by man that you will ever see, unless, of course, it be another arrow head or another stone axe.

Once they found a stone-walled grave, and within it some crumbling bones and a necklace of pierced shells from the far-distant seashore, as well as an axe and some arrow heads.

On another occasion they came upon a cave where they dug up a lot of stone things and half of a clay bowl upon which they could see scratched faint lines and patterns, but this soon crumbled into dust, because it had never been baked in the hot fire like our pottery of to-day.

Harry found thirty-six arrow heads in one day while following the man who was plowing a field.

Now, as most of these fossil animals and other things had tremendously long, hard names, and as most of the little boys found it impossible to re-

member one of them more than a day or so, perhaps, it was to Harry that they always came to learn what to call their prizes. He never failed to find the right name, and he always remembered what he had read.

They were really awful, some of these names: Uintatherium, megatherium, plesiosaurus, ichthyosaurus, mesohippus, pterosaur, hyperodapedon, paradoxid and cephalaspis were some of them, so you can see what a mind Henry Ramsdell possessed! Think of having to read and remember about "pithecanthropus alalus" or "the monophyletic origin of mammalia from the monotremata of cenozoic times!"

Why, it's enough to turn even my own head sometimes, and I've been struggling with it since I was a boy! He knew how from fishes reptiles came and then changed slowly during millions of years into warm-blooded animals, and he knew just what rocks to examine in order to discover the fossils of each period, and it was quite wonderful how exact he became, so that in time he was called the "Geologist" by all the neighbors.

One day little Gardiner asked him a real puzzler! "Say, Harry, what's the reason when we find all sorts of things in the quarry—birds, plants, fishes and bugs—we never find any eggs? Isn't that a funny thing?"

Without thinking, as some boys might have done, that his brother was always asking about eggs and other baby things, Harry began to wonder why, in fact, we never find these things. It seemed to him that when even feathers are discovered! In the stones, once in a while, at least, an egg of some reptile or bird might turn up.

Of course, he knew very well that as eggs are so exceedingly frail and delicate they would easily be smashed, but occasionally one might have sunk into the soft mud and been preserved just as feathers have been.

He asked the workmen in the quarry, and while they said that certain round stones had been found occasionally they supposed them to be merely water-worn pebbles and not fossils, so they had taken no particular notice of them.

They showed him a place where the stone was very soft and crumbly, which was not useful for building purposes, and said that there they had sometimes found these round things. So Harry, with pick and shovel, began to dig and with a crowbar to pry off ledges of the soft, gray stone day after day, finding all manner of things, but nothing like an egg.

But one afternoon when a mighty blast had broken off an immense mass of rock in another part of the quarry a great rounded stone was discovered, a stone oval in shape, a perfect egg, in fact, but so large as to make it seem impossible that it could be an egg. It was as big around as a large pumpkin, whitish in color and very heavy, but not nearly as heavy as a solid stone would be, it certainly seemed to Harry as he rolled it home.

It was an egg certain, but whether the egg of a gigantic bird, far bigger than any bird so far discovered, or that of a reptile a hundred feet long, nobody could say.

Mr. Biddell, Harry's father's partner, who seemed to hate Harry and always sneered at his studies and his digging among the rocks, said it was only a boulder worn round by the water, but Mr. Squires, the druggist, was sure that it was an egg.

Now, while I think of it, I will tell you something about Mr. Biddell. He was a bad man who was trying to ruin Harry's father by getting into debt so that he would have to sell the quarry, when Biddell intended to buy it and have it all to himself. It is not necessary to explain all the details of his wicked schemes, but simply to say that he had Harry's father in his power, and before a couple of years had passed Mr. Ramsdell, one of the nicest men in the world, would have been obliged to go to the poorhouse with all of his lovely family, Harry included.

But, as you will see, the plot failed and Mr. Biddell was the loser, although he didn't go to the poorhouse; oh, no!

After everybody had seen the great egg and grown tired of discussing it Harry was still thinking about it, and finally he decided that it must still have something soft within if it was not entirely fluid inside, for he was sure he detected a sound when it was rolled.

One day a sudden resolve formed. He determined to see what the hot summer sun would do to it, and forthwith he rolled it to a place where it might lie undisturbed, which was a hole in the hillside where the workmen had dug out a deep broad pit seeking for rock and then had deserted the spot.

Here he left the great egg for weeks and weeks

until one day when he went to look at it he was astonished to see that it was splitting open and a snake-like head was sticking out!

He was frightened, but when he saw that the thing emerging from the egg seemed about half-dead, its head hanging, languidly down, he sprang into the pit and went close to it.

Then he saw that it didn't look so snaky, but more like a turtle's head and that its eyes were not visible. The creature seemed too weak to split the hard stony shell of the egg, but Harry in great excitement seized the edge where it split and pulled with all his might.

Slowly it gave way and soon the wonderful creature seemed to take a big breath and began to struggle to get out.

Harry helped him to rid himself of his shell, and when he emerged he opened his eyes and looked at the boy quite mildly so that he was not the least afraid. Then the thought struck Harry that a drink of water would be the best thing for an animal that had been drying up in the rocks for so many ages, and he ran to the brook and filled his hat.

The creature eagerly drank it all and wanted more. Six times did Harry carry it a hatful of water, and then it began to move about the pit slowly something after the manner of a turtle, although it didn't resemble that animal in the least.

Just then little Polly Jenkins, who was picking blackberries on the hill, strolled along, looked down into the pit and uttered a yell that was heard away over at the quarry. Harry then realized what a fearful looking thing had come from his egg.

It was about two yards long and as tall as a setter dog, with a tail something like that of a kangaroo. On its head were three small horns, and a broad flap like the sailor collar of a boy's shirt covered its neck like a thick leather apron. Claws like a snapping turtle it had, and its skin was thick and marked like an alligator's. Its eyes were small and gleaming, but very mild and soft.

Just then Harry appeared, having heard Polly yell, and he began to run around in circles, barking like all possessed! The thing was not at all alarmed, but simply held its head down and its horns forward like a cow at bay, and Harry was afraid to go nearer.

Daylight was passing and Harry decided to leave his strange prize there until morning, for he didn't think it could climb out of the pit; but on reflection he threw down an armful of grass and leaves and was delighted to see the Thing begin to eat eagerly.

Next morning he carried a dozen cabbages to the spot and found the animal apparently in pain, squealing like a pig, but when he saw Harry he became quiet and devoured the cabbages with every sign of pleasure.

Pinky was still excited, but the animal was not alarmed at all. He ate cabbages from Harry's hand as tamely as a rabbit might, and when they were finished rubbed against him as if waiting for more. Harry saw that he was now quite strong, and he tied a rope about his neck in order to lead him home.

You can imagine the excitement created in Watertown when the boy came marching along with this startling creature in tow! People ran out to look and skipped indoors in a jiffy! Men who came suddenly from around corners took one look and flew down the street to sign the pledge never to drink again! Cats climbed trees, dogs shot through the fences, women screamed and horses neighed as they passed along! The one policeman turned pale and leaned against the hotel porch!

Harry got his prize home and into the back yard and went indoors to tell his mother all about it. She took one peep and fainted, and then Mr. Ramsdell came in. He wouldn't believe Harry's story, but when he saw the creature moving about the yard his eyes popped out and his jaw fell.

Then he helped Harry look up the thing in the books, and finally they discovered that the head of just such a creature had been found turned to stone in Wyoming and it was called a Triceratops! So this was a Triceratops! Harry did not know what a Triceratops fed upon, but the fact that he ate cabbages seemed to show that he was a vegetarian, and so it was decided to feed him upon such things.

He grew and grew and grew! So quickly did he increase that in a month he was as tall as the second story and when his head was at the back door his tail touched the rear fence thirty-five feet away!

He loved Harry. He simply wriggled with glee when the boy appeared, but that he very likely copied from Pinky's actions. Toward the boy's parents he preserved a cold manner, rarely seeming to wish them to pat him, but as they often fed him he showed no dislike; but my, how he did hate Mr. Biddell!

HOW THE STRANGE BEAST OF ANCIENT TIMES CAME TO LIFE AFTER CENTURIES, BECAME A HOUSEHOLD PET AND SAVED HIS MASTER'S FATHER FROM RUIN

That Triceratops seemed to know that he was a bad man and scented his wickedness at once. He tried to seize him the very first time he stepped into the yard, before Tri was half-grown, and the man only escaped those sharp teeth by jumping the fence. Tri moved slowly and clumsily, but when he wished he could leap like a lion, and, standing with his heavy tail holding him up, he could reach and eat all the leaves from very tall trees, so that every bit of foliage was soon missing from the yard.

But he was rather stupid, too, for he never seemed to learn that he could push the fence over quite easily and roam over other yards at will, and he was constantly trying to crowd his great body through the kitchen door! When the back gate was open he would stand there with his head out and squeal to be allowed to go outside, yet he never tried to force the gateposts. He just had brains enough, it seemed, to think a very little bit, but not enough to do him much good.

All the neighbors fully expected him, however, to break loose some day and devour all the citizens of Watertown, and many of them had arranged just how to act when that happened; but I am afraid that few of them would have done a thing as this enormous reptile ever realized how powerful he was and taken to rampaging about the village.

One day a man who had a bill to collect from Harry's father came to the house. The bill had been contracted by Mr. Biddell, but he had managed to put it on Mr. Ramsdell somehow, and when Mr. Ramsdell refused to pay it the collector said many things which I cannot repeat here, for he was disappointed. He made such a fuss that even Tri heard him and looked over the side fence to see what was happening. Just then the collector came along grumbling in loud tones and looked up to see that awful three-horned head, six feet long, looking down at him with a smile.

He stopped and trembled, but when Tri, smiling yet more pleasantly, reached down to him he turned a back somersault and ran down the street for a mile. He refused to try to collect any more bills in Watertown, and so Mr. Biddell was obliged to get another man to help him ruin Harry's father.

This was soon found to be impossible, and finally the villain determined to get the sheriff from Uddington to take all the bills he had against Mr. Ramsdell and by demanding payment suddenly ruin him completely, so that he would have to sell out this valuable quarry to get money enough to live on.

The sheriff came in a carriage, which he left in the side street, and then had a long talk with Mr. Ramsdell. During the conversation the sheriff revealed the fact that Mr. Biddell was the sole cause of this sudden demand for money, and so Mr. Ramsdell sent for his partner, who soon came and admitted that he had put in operation this plan to get his money.

Mr. Ramsdell was so disheartened that he was speechless, for he had never suspected his smooth-talking partner at all.

When he was obliged to reveal all his wicked intentions Mr. Biddell became very insulting and jeered his partner, saying that he was not a business man and anybody could skin him. They were in the back parlor overlooking the yard where Tri was stretched out in the warm sunshine, and hearing the voice of the man he hated he raised his gigantic head to the level of the window. There he saw his enemy and the hood over his head swelled up like the skin on an angry turkey cock and his eyes glittered.

In another moment, as Mr. Biddell was laughing at Mr. Ramsdell's pitiful face, Triceratops darted his great head into the room and seized Biddell by the back of the neck and then pulled him outside.

There he stood up on his hind legs and shook the man as a terrier does a rat, swinging him from side to side so rapidly that one could scarcely know that it was a man. He looked more like a bundle of rags. After shaking him for a while the animal suddenly opened his mouth and swallowed him in one gulp!

It was all done before anybody could say "Jack Robinson," but when Mr. Biddell disappeared forever down Tri's throat everybody uttered a yell that seemed to astonish the reptile, usually so mild and gentle, and he retreated to the end of the yard as if expecting Harry to come out and punish him.

But the boy instantly realized that they never would miss Mr. Biddell at all. He thought that was the best way out of the difficulty, and the sheriff soon came to the same conclusion, because Mr. Biddell happened to have in his hand all the bills and notes which showed Mr. Ramsdell's debts, and of course Tri swallowed them with the man.

"I don't see as how we can get at them lesser we cut the animal open!" said the sheriff, "and I don't hanker after that job."

So he went away and that was the last of it.

But, alas! the dose had been too much for poor Tri, who, being a strict vegetarian, was poisoned by Mr. Biddell, and little by little, day by day, he faded away and in two weeks was dead. To the last he gazed tenderly and lovingly at Harry and seemed to want him by his side, and when he died they had him stuffed and mounted so that for all time we might, all of us, know what a Triceratops looked like.

I do not think another egg is likely to be found, and if it is the chances are against it being hatched successfully, for it is unlikely that, being so awfully old, it will be fresh enough.

Such things, I think, are in the main merely accidents, and such accidents rarely happen twice. Harry still mourns the untimely death of his pet, for he thinks he ought to have lived a long time, but when one considers how many ages he lay there in the rock it's a wonder he lived at all.

Pinky, perhaps, is the only one who is really and truly glad the Triceratops died, for they were dreadfully jealous of each other, and when Tri endeavored to climb up on Harry's lap Pinky always tried to bite his tail.

If at any time you happen to be in Watertown go to Harry's house and mention my name, when he will gladly show you the great creature in the grand hall which he has built for him. Although he generally charges fifty cents admission to other people, he lets my little friends see him for nothing.

WALT McDUGALL.